

Attack in 2016 on Munich shopping centre was an act of right-wing terrorism

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The German authorities and media regularly exaggerate and exploit terrorist acts or acts of violence perpetrated by Islamist or left-wing groups to justify the strengthening of the police-state apparatus and further surveillance, and to agitate against refugees. By contrast, right-wing terrorist attacks and violence are downplayed, and their political motives often denied.

This has been revealed once again by the case of the cold-blooded murder of nine people from an immigrant background by 18-year-old David S. on July 22, 2016, in Munich's Olympia shopping centre.

What at first appeared to be a "shooting spree" was soon exposed to be an act obviously motivated by right-wing extremist views. The perpetrator was a convinced neo-Nazi and racist. Nonetheless, the investigating authorities and Munich state prosecutor continue to this day to refuse to describe the attack as an act of right-wing political terrorism.

The Bavarian state intelligence agency described the perpetrator as a "psychologically disturbed avenger" and a "rampager." The fact he was bullied at school was the main focus of investigations into the attack. The state prosecutor and Bavarian office of criminal police (LKA) wrote in their final report, "It cannot be assumed that the attack was politically motivated."

They continued to stick to this position after three academics presented reports at Munich's city hall that came to a very different conclusion. According to them, the attack was not revenge for bullying at school, but was rather motivated by the perpetrator's extremist world view.

The Office for Democracy in Bavaria's capital city hired academics Christoph Kopke, Matthias Quent and Florian Hartleb to examine the young shooter's right-wing background. The trio was able to review the state prosecutor's investigation files, question witnesses and examine data from the attacker's computer.

Hartleb, a political scientist, reported that David S. was not so isolated as has been claimed. "He was even class spokesperson," noted Hartleb. Unlike previous mass shooters, S. did not carry out the murders at his own school, the location of his bullying experiences. He knew none of his victims. On the day of the attack, David S. saved a document on his computer that stated, "I want to exterminate all German Turks now—regardless of whom." The bullying thesis thus played a much smaller role than the authorities alleged.

David S. carried out the terrorist attack as a "lone wolf," one of the reports continued. The 18-year-old had a firm ultra-right outlook and developed hatred towards people with an immigrant background. The date of the attack was also no accident. It was the anniversary of the mass shooting by right-wing Norwegian terrorist Anders Breivik, who David S. saw as a model or "supreme hero," as Kopke put it.

The *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* reported a year ago that David S. considered it a "distinction" that his birthday was April 20, 1998, the anniversary of Adolf Hitler's.

The fact that S.'s parents were Iranian played no role, explained Hartleb. By devaluing immigrants, he could prove himself to be a "real German." In a manifesto authored a year prior to the attack, David S. indicated that he considered his Iranian origin to be a special honour because Iranians have the same Aryan origin as Germans. In the pamphlet, the future attacker wrote of "foreign sub-humans," "cockroaches" and people he would "execute."

Hartleb did not see the fact that S. apparently had no connections with extremists as proof that S. was not a terrorist. The case, in which an individual acted without the support of an organization, conformed much more to a process of self-radicalisation. This was a "rare, although increasingly common special kind of terrorism."

Quent, head of the Institute for Democracy and Civil

Society in Jena, stated that the events at the shopping centre could be described as the “action of a terrorist acting alone.” The authorities excluded the issues of prejudice and racism. The victims “were not murdered because people who looked similar may have bullied David S., but because David S. had developed a generalised hatred for all people with what from his point of view were specific characteristics.” What is this if it is not racism, he asked, particularly from the standpoint of those affected.

Quent dealt with another aspect arising out of the authorities’ version of events. By referring to the perpetrator’s possible negative experiences with fellow students of Turkish or Albanian origins, the victims were made jointly responsible for the attack.

This was also the attitude of the authorities in regard to the murders committed by the National Socialist Underground (NSU) terrorist group, two of which took place in Munich. The police did not conduct an investigation into right-wing terrorism, although profilers considered this suspicion as likely, but treated the immigrants themselves as suspects. In accordance with this, investigators intimidated relatives of the victims.

Quent wrote in his report, “The victims of the attack bear no responsibility for the offender’s bullying experiences.” He demanded that the authorities condemn the destructive impact of racism, rather than justifying them with references to causes in the interests of the perpetrator.

Kopke, a professor of political science at the Institution for Economics and Law in Berlin, chose not to go as far as his colleagues and describe the attack as a terrorist act. But even David S.’s references to right-wing extremism qualified the attack as a hate crime and fulfil the criteria for the constitutional definition of “right-wing politically motivated crime (PMK),” according to Kopke.

The authorities reject this interpretation. The domestic intelligence agency, whose “estimations” provided the basis for the conclusion that David S.’s alleged motivation was “unpolitical,” did not attend the presentation of the reports on Friday, despite being invited.

Senior prosecutor Gabriele Tilmann spoke of an “impenetrable mélange” of motives for the attack. The authorities could not conceal David S.’s right-wing opinions. But these did not “trigger the attack,” claimed Tilmann. “We consider the perpetrator’s illness due to many years of bullying to be the primary cause.” Jürgen Miller, chief special investigator at the LKA, asserted, “It

was an attack guided by revenge and anger with a variety of motives.”

According to the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, chief senior prosecutor Hans Kornprobst declared a day prior to the report’s release, “I want to warn against compartmentalising the whole thing, even though some want it that way.” Placing a right-wing “stamp” on the attack was a “crude simplification” of the perpetrator’s motives.

While Kornprobst here opposes “crude simplification,” in the case of Islamist acts of terror this has “long become a well-practiced routine,” as Georg Dietz wrote in a column published by *Spiegel Online*. “In the case of Islamist-motivated killings or attempted murders, regardless of how the Islamist connection is identified, a conspiracy is sought after; in the case of killings motivated by right-wing extremism, even when the connection is clear, they search for understanding.”

This evasive “search for understanding” does not simply stem from the rightward-leaning outlook of the authorities, but also from the fact that the intelligence agencies and police have often known about, and even jointly organised, such attacks. This applies to the NSU murders as it does to the Oktoberfest bombing in 1980. In the case of the terrorist attack at the Oktoberfest, the authorities have referred for decades to the psychologically unstable “lone” perpetrator, Gundolf Köhler, and covered up his right-wing connections and co-conspirators.

The trial in the Munich District Court of Appeals of David S.’s alleged weapons supplier, Philipp K., continues to proceed along these same lines. The accused sold the weapon and ammunition to the young shooter for his murderous assault. There are not only indications of his right-wing views in the investigation files, but also evidence that he possibly knew of plans for an attack beforehand.

However, the state prosecutor could not find any evidence of foreknowledge of and therefore co-conspiracy in the attack, nor a right-wing motive for supplying the weapon. The weapons’ dealer is as a result not being charged with terrorism, but for “violating the weapons law and involuntary manslaughter.”



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